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Finland

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I. Process for the drafting of the report

1. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs drafted and coordinated Finland's third National Report for the Universal Periodic Review and finalised it jointly with other Ministries.

2. Drafting the report simultaneously with the second National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights offered Finland an opportunity to assess the national human rights situation comprehensively and to discuss it openly with civil society. The overseers of legality, the special ombudsmen, advisory boards and non-governmental organisations studied the defects in the full realisation of fundamental (constitutional rights enjoyed equally by all individuals) and human rights and the related challenges, proposing the Government measures to improve the situation. The Action Plan responds to these proposals with many projects. In preparing the Action Plan, numerous stakeholders, e.g. NGOs, were consulted in December 2015 and February and September 2016. The preparatory material was also used for drafting the UPR report.

3. In December 2016, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs circulated the draft UPR report for comment to more than 130 stakeholders, including public authorities, the supreme overseers of legality and the special ombudsmen, advisory boards, the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, the Sámi Parliament, the churches and religious congregations, and numerous NGOs.

4. At a meeting held in December 2016 at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, NGOs commented on the draft report.

5. Attention is called to the Universal Periodic Review and Finland's preparations for it through the social media and the website of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

II. Implementation of recommendations from the previous cycle

The Government's objectives to strengthen the fulfilment of human rights

6. In 2017 Finland celebrates its 100th anniversary of independence. Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government, appointed in May 2015, aims to raise the Finnish economy on to a path of sustainable growth and rising employment, and to secure the funding of public services and social security. The Government will implement structural reforms promoting employment, entrepreneurship and economic growth. In the field of wellbeing and health, emphasis will be placed on early support and inclusion, preventive methods and effective customer-oriented service chains across administrative boundaries. The Government aims to strengthen the fulfilment of human rights and to offer people opportunities to make their own choices. It will promote work-related migration and encourage open debate about migration policy but will not tolerate racism. In implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, it will give special attention to human rights related commitments. The Government will also promote a tolerant and humane national discussion culture.

Government's Human Rights Report

7. In addition to the Government programme, the Government's Human Rights Report 2014 is another key instrument steering the implementation of human rights policies. The report addresses both Finland's international human rights activities and the implementation of fundamental and human rights nationally. It emphasises long-term

measures to promote equality. Other important principles and objectives in the Government's activities are the coverage and universality of human rights and strong participation rights for civil society. In its own activities, the Government is committed to zero tolerance of racist speech and other hate speech. When drafting the report the Government consulted NGOs, the overseers of legality and other fundamental and human rights experts. Nearly one thousand people answered a fundamental and human rights questionnaire published at the *Otakantaa.fi* website for public participation.

8. During the current electoral term the Government will not issue a new human rights report. The intervals between such reports will be prolonged, for future reports should direct the main outlines of fundamental and human rights activities over a longer term.

Second National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights

9. The second National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights for 2017–2019 aims to promote these rights by concrete measures. Furthermore, it aims at consistency in fundamental and human rights policies both nationally and internationally.

10. In preparing the Action Plan the Government examined the recent recommendations given to Finland by international and regional treaty monitoring bodies and other human rights mechanisms, including the UPR process, and international case law concerning Finland. Moreover, the Action Plan is based on the independent evaluation of the previous Action Plan, the Government Programme, the Government's Human Rights Report and the opinions expressed by Parliament when reading the latter. The supreme overseers of legality, the special ombudsmen, authorities and NGOs have also been heard.

11. The first Action Plan, for 2012–2013, was cross-administrative, covered the entire Government and contained 67 separate projects to enhance the fulfilment of fundamental and human rights. The independent evaluation of the Action Plan considered it a significant step in developing the national human rights architecture. It was considered to increase transparency in the Government's human rights activities and to bring different stakeholders together to discuss major fundamental and human rights problems in Finland. However, the evaluation criticised the Action Plan for incoherence and recommended that the next one should focus on selected themes of fundamental and human rights, to better promote the fulfilment of such rights.

12. The new Action Plan, taking account of the criticism and recommendations, focuses on fundamental and human rights education, equality and non-discrimination, the right of individuals and groups to self-determination, and fundamental rights and digitalisation. It contains 43 projects under the different ministries. The implementation of the measures is monitored by indicators defined for each measure.

13. The implementation will be evaluated independently when the next electoral term begins. Moreover, independent supervisory authorities, e.g. the special ombudsmen, the Human Rights Centre, its Human Rights Delegation, and NGOs, are important independent supervisors of the implementation.

Human Rights Strategy of the Foreign Service

14. The 2013 Human Rights Strategy of the Foreign Service of Finland defines the elimination of discrimination and greater openness and inclusion as its cross-cutting themes, guiding all activities. Flagship projects based on the themes include strengthening the human rights and participation opportunities of women and girls, and promoting the legally binding effect and fulfilment of economic, social and cultural rights. The Ministry

for Foreign Affairs regularly consults with civil society, *inter alia*, through an advisory network of experts on human rights and foreign policy.

Government network of contact persons for fundamental and human rights

15. The Government network of contact persons for fundamental and human rights, founded in 2012 and appointed for a new four-year term in autumn 2015, has established its status and activities. The network monitors the national fundamental and human rights situation, compliance with international obligations and the implementation of the Government's fundamental and human rights policy. It is also mandated to prepare the second National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights and to monitor its implementation.

16. The network consists of representatives of ministries and experts from the Human Rights Centre and the offices of the supreme overseers of legality, i.e. the Parliamentary Ombudsman and the Chancellor of Justice of the Government.

17. The network will consider the new UPR recommendations to Finland and monitor their implementation.

Implementation of recommendations from the previous cycle

18. Under the Constitution of Finland, public authorities must guarantee the observance of fundamental and human rights. The Constitution requires that public authorities guarantee actively the observance of these rights even despite significant changes in the operating environment.

19. After the previous UPR review of Finland, both economic problems and the exceptional influx of asylum-seekers have influenced the setting for realising fundamental and human rights. Moreover, major structural reforms are going on e.g. in social welfare and health care, and local and regional government. The main objective of the social welfare and health care reform is to narrow gaps in health and wellbeing and to promote equality.

20. Of the 78 recommendations of the second UPR round, Finland accepted entirely 71 and partly four and abstained from responding to three. The implementation of the entirely or partly accepted recommendations has produced progress in many respects.

21. The Government network of contact persons for fundamental and human rights has examined the recommendations. In 2014 Finland assessed the implementation situation comprehensively and submitted a voluntary interim implementation report to the Human Rights Council.

22. The recommendations were used in preparing the second National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights, e.g. as a normative basis for its projects.

Ratifications of human rights treaties

23. Finland has implemented most recommendations to ratify human rights treaties. It has ratified nearly all central human rights treaties of the UN and the Council of Europe, ensuring that the national legislation complies with the objectives and goals of the treaties before they become effective nationally. To strengthen the legal protection of individuals, Finland has accepted optional protocols permitting individual communications.

24. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography took effect in Finland in July 2012, and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in September 2012.

25. The Optional Protocol of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights entered into force in Finland in April 2014. Finland recognized the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications from both individuals and States Parties, and its competence for the inquiry procedure.

26. The Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment took effect in Finland in November 2014. The Parliamentary Ombudsman was designated as the national preventive mechanism under the Protocol. Under the Parliamentary Ombudsman Act, the Ombudsman already had the special duty of inspecting closed institutions and overseeing the treatment of the inmates. However, the Optional Protocol brought several new elements and requirements to the inspections. The competence of the national preventive mechanism also extends to other private entities maintaining places where persons deprived of their liberty are or may be kept in detention at an authority's order or request or with its consent or contribution.

27. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention) took effect in Finland in August 2015. The Committee for combating violence against women and domestic violence started operating at the beginning of 2017. It is responsible for coordinating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating principles and actions to prevent and combat all forms of violence within the scope of the Convention. The Committee will prepare a plan for implementing the Convention.

28. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure entered into force in Finland in February 2016. The individual communications procedure strengthens the status of both complainant children and other children, and the status of children's rights as legally binding human rights. The Ombudsman for Children and NGOs have repeatedly highlighted the need to develop child-friendly legal remedies.

29. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol took effect in Finland in June 2016. Its ratification required legislative amendments e.g. in the Municipality of Residence Act, the Social Welfare Act and the Act on Special Care for the Mentally Handicapped.

30. To comply with the requirements of Article 33 of the Convention, Finland has developed structures for implementing the Convention and monitoring the implementation. The national focal points under the Convention are the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. A new Advisory Board for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was appointed in January 2017. It replaces the earlier National Council on Disability. The Advisory Board operates as a coordination mechanism under the Convention. Its members represent ministries, persons with disabilities or their family members, regional and local government, and labour market organisations. The term of the first Advisory Board will expire in April 2019. The national human rights institution, consisting of the Human Rights Centre, its Human Rights Delegation and the Parliamentary Ombudsman, is an autonomous and independent structure that works to promote, protect and monitor the national implementation of the Convention. In June 2016 a human rights committee of persons with disabilities was established as a permanent division under the Human Rights Delegation for the inclusion and participation of these persons and their representative organisations.

31. The Government is drafting a proposal to Parliament to accept the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The Government proposes that Finland should recognise the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances in full.

32. The Government is not ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and, therefore, will not implement the related recommendations. Finnish law makes no distinction between migrant workers and other immigrants. The same constitutional rights and ratified human rights instruments protect all. Their eligibility for social security is based either on employment or residence in Finland. In addition to the national social security legislation, social security agreements concluded by Finland and the European Union's social security legislation – all including the obligation of equal treatment – influence the status of foreign employees.

33. ILO Convention No. 189 concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers entered into force in Finland in January 2016. When ratifying it, Finland had to repeal the Act on the Employment of Household Workers and to ensure household workers equal treatment to the extent possible.

34. In November 2014 the Government submitted to Parliament a proposal to accept ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. The consideration of the proposal was deferred to the next electoral term, to the current Parliament. The national solution presented in the proposal will enhance the rights of the Sámi to participate in the planning of and decisions on the use of State-owned lands and waters in the Homeland, and their right to use these areas for practicing, maintaining and promoting Sámi culture. An international comparative legal study commissioned by the Government concerning the rights of indigenous peoples was completed in January 2017. The study provides elements for continued discussion about the Convention.

35. At the end of 2016 the delegations of Finland, Norway and Sweden achieved a preliminary result in the negotiations on a Nordic Sámi Convention. The Convention, negotiated jointly with representatives of the three States' Sámi Parliaments, enhances the status of the Sámi as an indigenous people and strengthens and consolidates their rights and cross-border cooperation.

Promotion of equality and monitoring of discrimination

36. Finland received many UPR recommendations to enhance anti-discrimination action. As response, the Government has taken specific legislative and other measures.

37. The new Finnish non-discrimination legislation took effect in January 2015. The reform strengthened the legal protection of victims of discrimination, enlarged the scope of prohibitions of discrimination and expanded the obligations to promote equality. The new Non-discrimination Act defines the forms of prohibited discrimination and the supervision of compliance with the Act. It obligates authorities, employers and providers of education and training to promote equality. The Act applies to all public and private activities, excluding private life, family life and religious worship. The Act on Equality between Women and Men prohibits discrimination based on gender, gender identity and gender expression.

38. The new Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal started operating at the beginning of 2015. The Ombudsman can be contacted in cases of experienced or observed discrimination based on age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. The Ombudsman is also responsible for promoting the conditions, rights and position of groups at risk of discrimination, e.g. aliens. Furthermore, the Ombudsman supervises the

removal of aliens from Finland and acts as the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings. The Tribunal is an autonomous and independent legal protection body appointed by the Government to provide legal remedies to anyone who has experienced discrimination or related prohibited victimisation.

39. The Non-discrimination Act also obligates different actors to assess and promote the realisation of equality. Authorities, providers of education and training and large employers must have prepared equality plans under the Act by 2017. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and occupational safety and health authorities supervise equality planning.

40. Since 2008, especially the national discrimination monitoring system has collected information to study the manifestation of discrimination experienced by different population groups in different sectors of life. The information describes not only experienced but also suspected discrimination known to authorities, related cases adjudicated by courts, and hate speech and hate crime. In 2015 the implementation of the monitoring system was transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Justice. The three-tier system consists of (1) collecting up-to-date discrimination information and research and publishing it at a specific website, (2) an annual discrimination study, and (3) a report on discrimination in Finland published once every electoral term (4 years). Both the monitoring system and the annual hate crime study produce information about discrimination against minorities. Such information is also received from separate studies by other stakeholders, e.g. the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, and from Eurobarometer surveys.

41. In 2014 the Ministry of the Interior published a summary of the information collected by the monitoring system. Studies show that many people (approx. 10–15% of the population), especially members of ethnic and religious minorities, sexual and gender minorities and different age groups as well as persons with disabilities, have experienced discrimination.

42. In 2015 the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman considered in all 496 client cases concerning discrimination on grounds prohibited by the Non-discrimination Act. Most cases concerned suspected discrimination based on ethnic origin or disability and related to private services, working life, housing and authorities' services.

43. The national action programme to combat discrimination, funded by ministries and the European Commission, was carried out in 2007–2015 with a number of measures to combat discrimination and to promote equality.

Measures to combat hate speech, extremist movements and violent extremism

44. Economic problems, uncertainties resulting from rapid changes in society and the refugee crisis have created a fertile breeding ground for hostile speech, extreme attitudes and sharp polarisation in Finland and elsewhere in Europe. Hate speech targets different population groups, minorities and individuals. It undermines the foundations of trust and safety. Hate speech and experience of threat have already triggered negative, in extreme cases even violent, behaviour against immigrants and diversity in general.

45. Research information exists in Finland about hate speech and harassment experienced by different population groups, e.g. members of minorities, foreign nationals, persons with immigrant background and persons with disabilities, and about the impacts of such behaviour. The surveyed groups have encountered harassment or hate speech most in public places, e.g. streets, parks and car parks, and second most on the internet and public discussion forums, especially Facebook. Hate speech and harassment have affected most the surveyed people's general feeling of safety (61%) and mental health (52%), and, among almost one third, undermined confidence in public authorities.

46. The Internal Security Programme adopted in 2012 aims at preventing and solving problems of everyday security.

47. The National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism was adopted in April 2016. Its measures also combat hate speech and prevent hate crime.

48. In September 2016 the Government discussed questions of hate speech, extremist movements and violent extremism. Life of dignity, guaranteed to everyone, means that no-one needs to encounter violence, threat or hostility. The Government decided to ensure efficient intervention in hate speech in future before more serious consequences arise. This means more efficient prevention, and criminal investigation by the police with emphasis on active revelation of hate speech and intervention in it by investigative means. A rapporteur will be appointed for the project. The National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights, too, includes measures to prevent hate speech on the internet and to intensify the combat against hate crime.

49. In autumn 2016 a working group appointed by the National Police Board mapped the current situation of hate speech and hate crime and issued its final report, including measures for improved activities. It proposed that the police increase their visible and preventive activities in the social media. A group focusing on combat against punishable hate speech and hate crime will be established under Helsinki Police Department. The group will have national responsibility while the virtual community policing of police departments will be strengthened.

50. In May 2016 the Ministry of Education and Culture launched an extensive Action Plan, *Meaningful in Finland*, to prevent hate speech and racism and to foster social inclusion. It contains ten measures for such areas as training of teaching staff, youth work, sports and dialogue between religions.

51. Finland has participated in the European Union's two-year *Good Practice* project to build up the capacity of the police and prosecutors to identify and deal with hate crime. The project has also extensively addressed hate speech issues, closely connected with hate crime.

52. In 2015 all parliamentary parties signed the Charter of European Parties for a Non-Racist Society, at the joint initiative of the Finnish League for Human Rights, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations. Thus the parties committed themselves to defending human rights, rejecting all forms of racist violence and incitement to racial hatred and harassment.

Promotion of good relations

53. In February 2016 the Government appointed the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO) for the sixth four-year term. Assisted by seven regional Advisory Boards for Ethnic Relations, ETNO fosters dialogue and cooperation between immigrants, ethnic minorities, public authorities, political parties and NGOs.

54. The Ministry of Justice has launched a project, *TRUST*, to promote good relations between different population groups in seven localities where asylum-seekers are staying. This pilot project is intended to develop models for increasing local interaction, strengthening the feeling of safety and increasing inclusion and positive attitudes. The project trains asylum-seekers, staff and volunteers working at reception centres, and staff of local authorities. On that basis, model trainings are designed, also for use by other stakeholders in future. After the training stage the *TRUST* project will study attitudes between different population groups in the pilot localities and launch development projects jointly with local stakeholders.

Fundamental and human rights education and training

55. During the previous review, Finland received recommendations to promote human rights education and training. The Government emphasised its commitment to such education and training, especially for different professional groups, clarifying in that context the autonomy of the Finnish higher education system: universities and vocational teacher education institutions develop their curricula independently. Fundamental and human rights education and training is now one key theme in the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights.

56. In 2014 the Human Rights Centre, part of the national human rights institution, published an extensive report on the implementation of human rights education and training in the Finnish education system. This first actual study of the amount, extent and quality of such activities ever conducted in Finland contains a situational overview and concrete proposals for measures in all educational sectors, from early-childhood to higher education and further education of office-holders.

57. The study indicates that inconsistency and lack of methodicalness are typical problems in human rights education and training. The implementation depends too much on the interest and activity of individual teachers, educators and providers, and human rights are not always taught as binding norms of international law. The worst deficiencies relate to the education of teachers, educators, officials and office-holders.

58. Recommendations of the Human Rights Delegation to enhance human rights education and training were published together with the study. They proposed e.g. that the Government prepare an action plan for such activities.

59. The Government aims to increase fundamental and human rights issues in the training of its new officials and arranges a separate related lecture course for government officials. Many ministries already provide internal training on these rights. Especially measures under the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights related to equality and the right to self-determination now include training on such rights for local officials.

60. Finland has well-functioning structures of education. The new national core curricula for basic and upper secondary education take account of fundamental and human rights more comprehensively than before in the value basis, overall objectives and contents of the education, with a pupil-oriented approach. The core curricula are becoming effective gradually since autumn 2016. Some contents dealing with fundamental and human rights are already taught in teacher education, and different teaching materials are abundantly available.

61. One objective of the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016-2019 is to raise awareness of equality in early childhood and other education. Measures under the Action Plan include gender and equality sensitive contents and methods in the basic and further education of teachers, educators and guidance counsellors, support equality planning in comprehensive schools and institutions of secondary education, and strengthen the training of experts of employment and industrial policy administration on eliminating gender-based segregation in the labour market.

Prevention and combat of violence against women

62. One priority of Finland's international human rights policy is to prevent and combat violence against women. In 2016 Finland was the seventh biggest funder of UN Women and the biggest funder of the Council of Europe fund for combating violence against women. Finland also supports the reinforcement of the rights and status of women and especially girls, e.g. through Unicef.

63. Violence against women is one of the worst human rights problems in Finland. The comprehensive survey of such violence published by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in spring 2014 showed that Finland is one of the three EU Member States with the highest percentage (30%) of women who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a former or current partner. The EU average is 22%. In Finland 33% of women have encountered such violence by a non-partner since the age of 15. The EU average is 22%. Finland is also one of the three Member States with the highest percentage (53%) of women with experience of psychological violence by a (current or former) partner. In Finland 71% of women have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15. This percentage, too, is among the highest within the EU.

64. Having received, during the previous UPR round, many recommendations to prevent and combat violence against women, Finland has implemented them by different measures. The prevention and combat of such violence is one priority of the current Government Action Plan for Gender Equality. The purpose is to ensure the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and the provision of specific social and health services to both victims and perpetrators of violence against women and domestic and intimate partner violence.

65. Sexual offences legislation was amended significantly in 2010–2014. In practice, also considering the earlier amendments, Chapter 20 of the Criminal Code concerning sexual offences has been completely revised since taking effect in 1999. Still, despite comprehensive legislation, only few rapes are reported to the police and few reported rapes are prosecuted. When discussing the realization of criminal liability and the legal protection that legislation and case law provide to victims of crime, both experts and the public have criticized penalties e.g. for lenience and an excessive use of the lowest levels of penal scales.

66. Finland has transposed the EU Victim's Directive by means of legislative amendments which took effect in March 2016. The Directive improves the position of victims of crime and requires e.g. the police to identify particularly vulnerable victims and take them into account in their procedures.

67. Shelter services for victims of violence have been available and developed continuously in Finland since the late 1970s. Specific measures to combat violence against women and domestic and intimate partner violence have been taken since the mid-1990s. The latest measure, the Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women, was implemented in 2010–2015, to tackle such violence proactively by influencing attitudes and behaviour models, to prevent revictimisation, to develop methods to identify and intervene in violence against vulnerable persons, and to improve the knowledge and capability of authorities and professionals to prevent such violence and help its victims. The Action Plan trained 200 key trainers, who in turn trained e.g. local child welfare authorities to identify and intervene in violence against women. A regional anti-violence roadshow in 2016 trained regional stakeholders extensively to intervene in such violence. Nevertheless, an external evaluation of the Action Plan showed that many measures must still be improved and, above all, sufficient resources ensured.

68. The MARAK model was introduced in Finland in 2010 to assist high-risk victims of intimate partner violence and prevent such serious violence. The idea is to prepare, in multi-agency teams, safety plans for real or potential victims to improve their safety. The objective is to end intimate partner violence and its risk and to ensure the necessary assistance to the victim from professionals/authorities after one report, as easily, quickly and simply as possible. At the beginning of 2016 the MARAK model covered more than 90 municipalities. The method has rapidly succeeded in reducing revictimisation.

69. The Act on Reimbursement out of State Funds for Providers of Shelters for Victims of Domestic Violence took effect in January 2015. It aims at guaranteeing comprehensive

high-quality shelter services throughout the country for real or potential victims of domestic or intimate partner violence. Finland is one of the few States with statutory State funding for shelters, which are run by trained professionals, free of charge to clients. National quality recommendations exist for shelters.

70. In 2016, a pilot project was launched to develop shelter services for sparsely populated regions. A 24/7 remote shelter unit was opened under another social welfare and health care unit. Psychosocial support was provided from a central shelter through remote access. Since the beginning of 2017, State-funding has made the operations permanent in the region. Similar shelters are being envisaged for other sparsely populated regions.

71. A State-funded 24/7 telephone help-line for victims of intimate partner violence was opened in December 2016.

72. Since the early 2000s, child health clinics have used a form for identifying violence against women, and the clinic staff has been trained to use the form systematically. The National Institute for Health and Welfare offers social welfare employees web-based training in identifying violence.

73. A guide has been published for hospital districts for creating a treatment chain to assist victims of sexually offensive violence. A support centre is being established to treat such victims. The acute services needed by the victims will be centralised in one unit, which ensures their referral to follow-up treatment and services. The first support centre will start in 2017. The longer term aim is for every university central hospital, throughout the country, to have a similar centre.

Prevention and combat of violence against children

74. Finland prohibited corporal punishment of children by law in 1984. Although disciplinary violence has clearly diminished, every fifth ninth-grader and approximately every tenth sixth-grader still report having experienced such violence. The corresponding percentages for psychological violence are 45% and 27%. The data is based on Child Victim Survey 2017.

75. The National Action Plan against Disciplinary Violence 2010-2015 aimed to strengthen the human dignity of children and to increase mutual respect between children and their parents. Despite good legislation and its implementation, Finland still has much to develop to prevent violence against children and their injuring themselves. A well-functioning and efficient prevention of such violence requires multisectoral and open information transfer and cooperation by different professionals. The Action Plan is followed up by the Programme to Address Child and Family Services, 2016–2018. Its purpose is to raise awareness of domestic, intimate partner and disciplinary violence as phenomena, to influence attitudes, and to develop and network regional know-how on violence prevention via low-threshold services available to family members. Moreover, the know-how of different professionals in intervening in domestic, intimate partner and disciplinary violence will be enhanced.

76. The new Social Welfare Act entered into force in April 2015. It emphasises the timeliness of assistance, improves the basic services and reduces the need for reparative measures. The Act strengthens the right of families with children to services that support their everyday coping – e.g. home-help services, family work, support persons and families, and peer group activities – proactively, also without child welfare clientship. The Act also obligates different professionals concerned about the wellbeing of families and children to refer them to social services and, if necessary, to contact social welfare professionals together with the parent and/or the child. Where necessary, professionals are also obliged to notify social or child welfare authorities of any concern about a child's wellbeing, even without the client's consent. The Child Welfare Act was also amended. Since April 2015,

notwithstanding secrecy provisions, professionals obligated to give child welfare notifications have also been obliged to notify the police directly of any suspected offence against a child's life or health.

77. A three-year development project (LASTA) to improve cooperation between the police, the prosecution service, child welfare authorities and health care in situations of suspected violence or sexual abuse against children ended in 2016. The project developed a cooperation model for rapidly mapping the suspected victim's background information and for directing authorities' activities towards responding to the child's and family's need for assistance.

Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities

78. Finland is active in highlighting issues of persons with disabilities in international fora. It supports, both politically and financially, projects to promote the realisation of their rights. These issues are an essential part of Finnish development policy, especially in cooperation with long-time partner countries and regional organisations. Particular attention is paid to multiple discrimination against women and girls. Finland is one of the major funders of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and the UN Disability Partnership Programme.

79. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and the discrimination monitoring system, operating under the Ministry of Justice, have surveyed online in what everyday situations, and to what extent, persons with disabilities experience discrimination and unjust behaviour in Finland. Besides their experience of discrimination generally, such experience in employment, the accessibility of online services, and access to goods and services were examined. A clear majority (64.2%) of the respondents had experienced discrimination during the past year. Over half of them (51.4%) consider the attitudinal climate towards persons with disabilities bad or very bad.

80. When bringing into force the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Finland had to revise the Act on Special Care for the Mentally Handicapped. The Act contains new provisions on e.g. strengthening the right to self-determination, supporting independent coping, reducing the use of restrictive measures, preconditions for using them, procedures for decisions on such measures, and intensified supervision by authorities. In 2017, the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health focuses its supervision on the realisation of the right to self-determination in the care of persons with intellectual disabilities.

81. In 2010–2015 Finland implemented a housing programme for persons with intellectual disabilities. The intention was to ensure individual housing for such persons moving from either an institution or their childhood home. This includes an accessible and well-functioning dwelling in an ordinary residential environment and sufficient, individual and necessary services and support. The purpose is that no person with intellectual disability should live in an institution after 2020. During the programme, approximately 3,400 dwellings were produced, the use of institutional care decreased more rapidly than before, and the number of long-term clients in institutions for people with intellectual disabilities declined. Finland aims to increase such individual housing options and related supportive services in the future.

82. Finland's Disability Policy Programme 2010-2015 and its measures aimed to safeguard a just position in society for persons with disabilities and to outline the development paths through which to pursue sustainable and responsible disability policy. According to the evaluation of the programme implementation, most measures were completed as planned. Consequently, a positive trend is clearly visible especially in cultural and sports services, education and international cooperation. The programme also

strengthened the attention paid to the rights of persons with disabilities in all administrative sectors and increased cross-administrative cooperation on disability issues.

83. The Government is reforming the national disability legislation to consolidate the Disability Services Act and the Act on Special Care for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities into one Act on special services based on disability. The reform aims to increase the inclusion and equality of persons with disabilities. The Act would apply to persons who, because of functional limitations caused by long-lasting disability or illness, need assistance or support indispensably and repeatedly in order to cope in everyday life. The reform will strengthen the right of persons with disabilities and client-orientation, enable them to make their own choices and reinforce inclusion and the use of expertise by experience.

84. Through its key project on career opportunities for people with partial work ability, the Government supports the employment of persons with disabilities and their staying at work.

Promotion of minority rights – Roma

85. The National Policy on Roma has increased awareness of Roma issues and improved their national coordination. The measures assigned to different responsible ministries have succeeded best, and some have made significant progress, particularly in the educational sector. Especially the school attendance of girls has increased considerably. Local implementation has been more challenging. Particular challenges remain regarding the employment rate and adult education of Roma. An extensive study on the social and health-related wellbeing of Roma is being launched under the Policy. It is expected to produce more information about the needs for development in the social, health and welfare service system to better respond to the special needs of Roma.

86. Consultations with local authorities and organisations as well as national meetings between the Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs illustrate the well-functioning cooperation between Roma, the Government and local authorities. The active participation of Roma in the implementation of the National Policy reflects confidence between the actors. The Finnish practice of involving Roma in decision-making concerning them is another factor behind the confidence. The national Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is an important forum for the inclusion of Roma in national decision-making. It started a new three-year term at the beginning of 2017. Half of the members of the Advisory Board represent Roma.

87. However, a report on discrimination experienced by Roma in Finland, published by the Ombudsman for Minorities (the current Non-discrimination Ombudsman) in 2014, indicates that Roma often face discrimination in all sectors of life. In all 68.7% – an exceptionally high percentage – of all interviewed respondents reported experiences of discrimination in some area of life during the past year. The report also showed that many Roma (77.6%) were willing to change some feature of the Roma culture if it were possible. The results indicate willingness within the Roma community to discuss even difficult topics.

88. The reform of social and health services and regional administration strengthens the participation structures of the Roma themselves and the development of services from their perspective. The number of regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs will be increased from four to five and thus improve the local and regional opportunities to participate and influence. In Central Finland, the first Roma centre of excellence on social welfare and health care is being established. The aim is to establish a centre to develop culture-sensitive social and health services, to train staff in that sector and to enhance project know-how nationwide.

89. A number of regional and nationwide projects have been launched under the National Policy on Roma, especially in the fields of education and training, employment, social and health services and the maintenance of culture.

Prevention of human trafficking

90. The Government continues responding to the recommendations to prevent human trafficking by a National Plan of Action against Trafficking in Human Beings 2016-2017, adopted in October 2016. The Plan of Action, prepared on a broad basis, contains nine measures, with one or more responsible ministries designated for each, including the following: to develop the coordination of and national cooperation on anti-trafficking activities and to enhance outreach work for victims of trafficking, their identification and assistance to them.

91. NGOs are annually informed about tens of cases where a person residing in Finland is forced into marriage. In January 2017 the Government launched a new project to collect information about forced marriage as a phenomenon and thus to ensure that authorities cooperate and ensure access to criminal proceedings appropriately also in matters concerning forced marriage. Under the Criminal Code of Finland, forced marriage is punishable as ordinary or aggravated trafficking in human beings or as coercion. The Act is punishable irrespective of whether the coercion is committed in Finland or abroad. The study is expected to be completed in September 2017.

III. Implementation of voluntary commitments

International peace, security and human rights

92. Finland is a well-known and trusted actor in international development policy, peacekeeping and mediation operations. Finland has made vigorous efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security and is drafting its third national action plan. With mediation as one of its foreign policy priorities, Finland continues to develop international mediation and to strengthen its profile pursuant to the National Action Plan for Mediation adopted in December 2011. For example, Finland is co-chairing the Friends of Mediation groups of the UN, the EU and OSCE. The UN Friends group is a central and internationally visible mediation support group. At the initiative of Finland and Turkey, the group has negotiated four mediation resolutions, the latest of which was adopted by the UN Assembly in September 2016. The resolutions have reinforced the principles of the UN's mediation support activities and its key role in mediation. Regionally Finland continues to support the strengthening of mediation by the African Union. Dialogues are an emerging priority in Finland's mediation activities. For example, two international conferences on national dialogues and mediation have been held in Helsinki.

93. Taking note of global interdependencies, Finland promotes international stability, peace, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and equality. Human rights policy is an essential part of the foreign and security policy activities of the Government, which considers human rights policy as a means to create a world of greater human dignity, fairness and security. Finland supports Denmark as the joint Nordic candidate for the Human Rights Council in the 2018 election. Finland also wants to promote and safeguard human rights by standing for membership in the 2021 Council election. The chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2018–2019 will offer an opportunity to promote human rights regionally.

Commitment to achieve the development aid goal

94. Finland's development policy goals are defined in the Government Report on Development Policy adopted in February 2016, with a continued human-rights-based approach to development. Finland has consistently promoted the goals mentioned in the commitment, including cross-cutting goals, which are currently also steered by the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Based on Agenda 2030, Finland's development policy focuses especially on the rights of women and girls and the strengthening of developing countries' own economies to increase jobs, industries and wellbeing. The focuses also include well-functioning and democratic societies, the availability of food, water and energy, and the sustainable use of natural resources.

95. Finland aims to increase the development budget as the national economy recovers, in the long term to 0.7% of the gross national income in line with the UN goals. The percentage of funding to the least developed countries will exceed the internationally recommended 0.2% of the GNI during the current electoral term, too.

Commitment to submit a voluntary interim UPR report

96. Finland commits itself to submitting to the Human Rights Council, in summer 2019, a voluntary interim report on implementing the recommendations of the third UPR round.

IV. Achievements and good practices – challenges and limitations

Highest freedom of expression and opinion globally

97. Freedom of expression is a basic prerequisite for a free and democratic society. It is a necessary precondition for the realisation of transparency and responsibility, which in turn are essential for promoting and protecting human rights. The Constitution of Finland safeguards everyone's right to express, disseminate and receive information, opinions and other communications without prior prevention by anyone. This provision has been consistently clarified by legislation, e.g. the Act on the Exercise of Freedom of Expression in Mass Media, and by policy recommendations and instructions.

98. By international standards, Finland offers top-rank freedom of expression. In global rankings of freedom of press by *Reporters Without Borders*, Finland has held the top place in the last five years, thanks to access to information of public authorities, the high standard of source protection and the efforts to provide all citizens with a rapid web connection. There is no advance censorship, but the use of the freedom of expression may be subject to intervention retrospectively, if a published communication proves unlawful.

99. Permitting the media to work as independently and diversely as possible will be important also in future, to maintain the high standard of freedom of press. To ensure equality it is vital to protect the rights of those who, because of e.g. barriers to using information technology, have more limited opportunities to use their freedom of expression.

Pioneer in digitalisation and electronic government

100. Finnish society is undergoing a transition. Digitalisation contributes to the success of the major structural changes. Finland is one of the pioneer countries in digitalisation and electronic government.

101. One example of digitalisation projects is the National Architecture for Digital Services programme 2014-2017. It aims e.g. to simplify and facilitate transactions by citizens, companies and organisations with authorities, to improve security in this context, to promote openness in public administration, and to improve the quality of public services.

102. Under the Government Programme, besides producing electronic services, people's right to decide about and monitor the use of their personal information will be enhanced, while ensuring a smooth transfer of data between authorities. Help will be given to people who are not used to or are unable to use digital services.

103. In the context of the changes, authorities must comply with their obligation to protect fundamental and human rights.

104. In February 2016 the Government adopted principles of digitalisation for all public services as commonly agreed rules for developing public services. The principles include providing services based on customers' needs and building easy-to-use and secure services.

Equality between women and men and equal pay

105. Equality and non-discrimination are central values and goals in Finnish society. Finland has repeatedly taken top places in country rankings in terms of equality (e.g. the EIGE equality index).

106. Finland has worked long to strengthen equality, on a legislative basis consisting of the Constitution and the Act on Equality between Women and Men. Legislation is supplemented with Government Action Plans for Gender Equality. Since 2003, each Government has prepared such an Action Plan as a tool for coordinating the Government's gender equality policy including measures taken by all ministries. For instance the current Action Plan both includes measures to improve the position of women and men and mainstream equality objectives into important social reforms and key projects.

107. The Act on Equality between Women and Men aims to prevent gender-based discrimination, promote equality between women and men, and thus improve the status of women, particularly in working life. In principle, the Act applies to all activities and spheres of life in society. It prohibits direct and indirect gender-based discrimination. According to the Act, both sexual and gender-based harassment are to be considered discrimination under the Act. Furthermore, authorities must, in all their activities, promote equality purposefully and systematically, and create and consolidate administrative and operating practices that ensure the advancement of equality in the preparation of and decision-making on different matters. In particular, circumstances preventing the attainment of gender equality must be changed. The promotion of gender equality must be taken into account in the manner referred to above in the availability and supply of services. Compliance with the Act is supervised by the Ombudsman for Equality and the National Discrimination and Equality Tribunal.

108. Pay equality is one of the central issues in working life. Non-discriminatory and equal pay is a prerequisite for fair, high-quality and productive working life. Since 2006 the Government and the labour market central organisations have implemented an Equal Pay Programme. The Programme for 2016–2019 aims at narrowing the average pay gap between women and men and realising the principle of equal pay at workplaces.

Prevention of exclusion

109. The major domestic challenges are exclusion and the polarisation of society. The ten-year objective concerning wellbeing and health under the current Government

Programme is that people in Finland are healthier and in better control of their lives in different situations. This means e.g. reforming social security to encourage participation and employment. One central objective of the ongoing social welfare and health care reform is to narrow differences in wellbeing and health. The reform shifts the responsibility for social and health services to counties, but municipalities will continue to decide on many duties that are crucial to the inclusion of their residents. Wellbeing and health are influenced by e.g. early childhood and other education, and cultural and sports services.

110. The Government's key projects aim to speed up the combat against exclusion. The project to foster health and wellbeing and to reduce inequalities spreads and establishes good practices and operating models. The programme to address child and family services develops low-threshold services for children and improves the special know-how needed for assisting young people with most problems. Its purpose is to create an operating culture strengthening children's rights in both decision-making and services. The key project from youth guarantee towards community guarantee is intended to reduce the number of young persons outside education and working life. The project on career opportunities for people with partial work ability promotes the employment of such people in the open labour market.

111. The Act and action programme on preventive substance abuse work aim to promote equality in health and wellbeing. The Government is preparing an overall reform of the Alcohol Act.

Services for the elderly

112. Every fifth Finn is at least 65 years old. In September 2016, the interest organisation of pensioner associations (EETU) published a study showing that the worst concerns and problems of persons over 55 years today and in future are economic problems – like low pensions –, loneliness and the poor accessibility of social and health services. In his oversight activities, the Parliamentary Ombudsman has repeatedly paid attention to deficiencies in the conditions and treatment of the elderly, both in institutional care and service housing and in non-institutional care.

113. The Government's ageing policy aims to improve the functional capacity of the elderly and to promote their independence and active participation in society. A new key project of the Government, launched in autumn 2016, reforms home care, informal care and family care. The project aims to develop more equal, coordinated and cost-effective services for the elderly and their next-of-kin. The project increases services and multiprofessional rehabilitation to ensure as healthy and able a life as possible for the elderly, and develops the number and contents of services provided to them at home. The project also ensures high-quality treatment of elderly people at home, with support from their next-of-kin, and strengthens services to support informal caregivers' coping.

114. The Act on Supporting the Functional Capacity of the Older Population and on Social and Health Care Services for Older Persons took effect in July 2013. In that context the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities published jointly a quality recommendation to ensure good ageing and effective services for those elderly who need them, and to support the implementation of the Act. The Act is relevant to the realisation of elderly people's human rights and right to self-determination.

115. The objective of the National Memory Programme 2012-2020 is to make Finland a memory friendly country. It lists 32 measures to ensure that the prevention, diagnostics and treatment of memory diseases succeed as well as possible, respecting human rights.

116. The national programme to develop informal care in 2014–2020 outlines strategic development goals and necessary legislative and other development measures. The Government intends to increase the use of informal care and has reserved substantial funding for it under the Government Programme.

Future of immigration and impacts of refugee crisis in Finland

117. The sudden mass influx of applicants for asylum was visible in Finland as elsewhere in Europe. In 2015, Finland received the fourth most asylum-seekers per capita among the EU Member States. The number of asylum-seekers in Finland grew rapidly, to 32,476 persons. In 2014 the number was 3,651, which means a nearly ten-fold increase in asylum applications over the previous year.

118. The number of reception centres grew from 20 to 200, and the number of persons handling asylum matters from 75 to 500. Despite the large number of asylum-seekers, Finland has shown solidarity within the European Union by receiving asylum-seekers from Greece and Italy within the internal relocation mechanism.

119. In September 2015, as the number of asylum-seekers grew, an organisation centre was established in Tornio near the Swedish border, so that all asylum-seekers could be registered in the exceptional situation. The organisation centre managed to register in all 16,736 persons. It had an important role in ensuring that even the high number of asylum-seekers could be referred to reception services and that the services could be provided to all appropriately and as required by the Reception Conditions Directive.

120. In 2016 the number of asylum-seekers was considerably lower than the previous year. A total of 5,657 persons sought asylum in Finland. The number of asylum decisions, in all 28,200, was approximately four-fold compared to 2015. During 2016, the number of reception centres was reduced as the influx of asylum-seekers declined. There are now 126 centres with 16,000 residents, and approximately 3,700 asylum-seekers have private accommodation.

121. NGOs have expressed their concern about the rights of unaccompanied minors and the increasing difficulty in receiving international protection and family reunification.

122. The Government is considering alternatives to detention. Since February 2017 the law provides for a new administrative interim measure as an alternative to detention: the obligation of an alien to stay in a certain reception centre. The obligation means that an alien applying for international protection may be obligated to stay in a designated reception centre and report to the centre 1–4 times a day, if it is indispensable for establishing whether the person meets the requirements for entering the country or staying there, or for ensuring the removal of the person from the country. For an important personal reason, an alien obligated to stay in a particular reception centre may be released from the obligation temporarily.

123. If the preconditions exist for detaining an unaccompanied child aged 15 years or more, having applied for international protection and issued with an enforceable removal decision, the child may be obligated to stay in a particular reception centre. The application of it reduces the need to detain minors. Therefore, it also has a positive impact on the position of children and the implementation of their best interests.

124. The Government Integration Programme for 2016–2019, based on the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration, focuses on four areas: (1) using immigrants' cultural strengths to enhance Finnish innovation capacity; (2) enhancing integration through cross-sectoral measures; (3) increasing cooperation between the State and municipalities in the

reception of beneficiaries of international protection; (4) promoting a humane national discussion culture that will not tolerate racism.

125. When the asylum situation changed, the Government started to review the integration and employment measures and to plan new measures to accelerate the placement of recipients of residence permits to municipalities and their integration, access to education and employment.

126. Finland's policy is to keep immigration and its costs under control. At present, many factors hamper the education and employment of immigrants. The placement of recipients of residence permits to municipalities is slow. Immigrants' pathways to education and employment are long, with inefficiency, overlaps and sometimes irrelevant studies. Making the system more flexible and efficient is in the interest of the whole society especially in the changed situation, for the alternative is that immigrants remain living on social security without education and work.

127. Learning a national language, respect for the Finnish culture and customs, and access to work as fast as possible are in a key role. The current forms of multiprofessional support and student welfare services will improve the opportunities for learning, and the special needs of immigrants will be addressed in teacher education. Immigrants' inclusion in leisure and NGO activities will be promoted.

Alternatives to remand imprisonment and placement in prisons instead of police facilities

128. International treaty monitoring bodies and the Parliamentary Ombudsman have paid attention to deficiencies in the treatment of remand prisoners in Finland and to their excessively long detention in police facilities.

129. A recent government proposal to Parliament proposes the introduction of two new alternatives to remand imprisonment: an intensified travel ban and arrest as an alternative to remand imprisonment. Currently, the only alternative to remand imprisonment is an ordinary travel ban, which is used rather rarely. Instead of remanding a suspect of an offence, courts could impose an intensified travel ban on the person, if an ordinary travel ban were insufficient as a coercive measure. A lower court could impose an intensified travel ban on a defendant before sentencing the person to punishment.

130. After sentencing the defendant to unconditional imprisonment, the court could, instead of imprisoning the convict, impose on the person arrest as an alternative to remand imprisonment, if the sentence is less than two years of imprisonment. Thus, such arrest could not be used in cases of the most aggravated offences.

131. The use of both coercive measures would be supervised by means of technical devices. Arrest as an alternative to remand imprisonment would always include an obligation for the arrestee to stay at home or in some other place suitable for living at times specified in the court decision. Regarding an intensified travel ban, the imposition of such an obligation would be at the discretion of the court.

132. Aiming to reduce the keeping of remand prisoners in police facilities, the Government has submitted to Parliament a bill according to which a remand prisoner should in principle be placed in prison immediately after the remand. The preconditions for placing remand prisoners in police prisons would be tightened so that they could be held in police facilities only if it is indispensable for separating them from others, for security reasons or for clearing up an offence. The normal maximum period in police prison would be shortened from the current 30 days to 7 days.

133. All remand prisoners would be transferred to prison immediately after the remand. However, the aim will be pursued at stages during the next years, because the Criminal Sanctions Agency has no sufficient facilities yet for accommodating all remand prisoners, i.e. approximately 80 persons per day, in prisons.

Sámi people's status and rights

134. The status and rights of the Sámi – the only indigenous people in Finland – and especially their right to self-determination and the definition of a Sámi have aroused much acrimonious debate and conflicting views in the context of some legislative initiatives.

135. During the current electoral term the Government intends to revise the Act on the Sámi Parliament pursuant to a proposal submitted during the previous electoral term but cancelled later, by submitting most of the proposed revisions to Parliament again. In this context the Government will renew its proposal to alter the obligation of authorities to negotiate with the Sámi Parliament to better comply with the concept of free, prior and informed consent. The proposal also contains revisions of the Sámi Parliament's electoral procedures. The modification of the definition of a Sámi under the Act on the Sámi Parliament is also influenced by the Nordic Sámi Convention and its provisions on persons eligible to vote at the Sámi Parliament elections.

136. The revised Act on Metsähallitus entered into force in April 2016. With the revision, the forestry business of Metsähallitus was transferred to a fully State-owned limited liability company for forestry, to be established by the Act. All State-owned lands and waters remain in direct State ownership and are administered by Metsähallitus State enterprise. The subsidiary of Metsähallitus has the right to use the areas.

137. The Act on Metsähallitus contains provisions on municipal advisory committees to be established in the Sámi Homeland. The committees are expected to strengthen to some extent the right of the Sami as an indigenous people to maintain and develop their language and culture. The Sámi Parliament has designated its representatives to the committee.

138. The starting point for the negotiations between Finland and Norway on the Tana Fishery Agreement, started in 2012, was the need to revive weakened salmon stocks. The parties reached consensus on the Agreement in summer 2016. The negotiated Agreement is a compromise reconciling the protection of salmon, different fishing methods and the fishing rights of different fisher groups. The Agreement takes into account traditional fishing by the Sámi, fishing based on the ownership of the Tana waters and fishing tourism. Parliament is considering the acceptance of the Agreement.

139. The purpose of the Sámi Language Act is to ensure the constitutional right of the Sámi to maintain and develop their language and culture. The Act contains provisions on the right of the Sami to use their language before the courts and other public authorities and on the duty of the authorities to enforce and promote the linguistic rights of the Sámi. The Government's proposal to amend the Act has been sent for comments in January 2017.

Status and rights of sexual and gender minorities

140. The fundamental rights protected by the Constitution of Finland and the human rights based on international treaties belong without discrimination to members of sexual and gender minorities, too. The State must ensure the equal realisation of these rights. The Act on Equality between Women and Men was revised in 2015 by introducing prohibitions of discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression and by obligating authorities, providers of education and employers to prevent such discrimination

purposefully and methodically. A key principle under the programme to address child and family services is to take account of the diversity of families in the organisation and development of services.

141. At the end of 2014, Parliament adopted the gender-neutral Marriage Act, based on a citizens' initiative. As of March 2017 same-sex couples may conclude marriage. Until then they have been able to register their partnership.

142. In a joint position in November 2016, the Ombudsman for Equality and the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman stated that the current Act on Legal Recognition of the Gender of Transsexuals violates transgender persons' right to self-determination. The Act should be amended so that sterilisation or infertility for other reasons is no longer required for the recognition of gender.

143. In an opinion issued in 2016 the National Advisory Board on Social Welfare and Health Care Ethics proposed that, in the treatment of intersexual children, measures to modify their external sexual characteristics not be taken until the children themselves can both define their gender and form a position on their sexuality. A study on the rights and experiences of intersexual children will be made under the National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights 2017-2019.

V. Challenges and support from the international community

144. Nothing to report.